

# Iceland

## The Directorate of Customs – Reykjavík

### Details on the authority

The Directorate of Customs – Reykjavík (DOC) was established in 1929. From the beginning, the main service functions have remained the same. Firstly, to control import, transit and export, and secondly the collection of duties, taxes and various state revenue. DOC's main objectives are to increase control, prevent the importation of illegal goods, ensure correct levy of import charges and to improve collection results.

The administration of customs and internal revenue falls within the jurisdiction of the Minister of Finance, who is the head of customs affairs in the country. According to law, DOC is required to co-ordinate various work processes in the customs districts with regard to collection of duties, custom control and decision-making

The DOC has 195 full time employees working in several departments, 103 (53%) female and 92 (47%) male. The majority of the employees are between 25-55 years old (approx. 66%), around 6% of the employees are younger than 25 years old and 28% are older than 55 years old.

Most of the employees are office workers, but around 50 customs officers also work for the Directorate both during the usual office hours as well as on 24 hour shifts.

### Several WHP programmes

The office is not concentrating on one health promotion programme in partic-

ular. Through interviews conducted within the institution the objectives behind the various health promotion programmes have become clear, and they are, first and foremost, to create better and more positive employees. Therefore the projects are all aimed at improving the working conditions in a wider context.

### Responsibility by quality – and service manager

In April 1999 a quality and service manager was employed at the DOC. Prior to that the customs manager (the director of the department) had been responsible for these projects.

Since then the quality and service manager has been responsible for all the projects that aim at improving the employees' health and wellbeing at the Directorate. The quality and service manager has, on occasions, called on private enterprises to make evaluations of the workplace environment. Also the quality and service manager has worked in co-operation with a representative of the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health.

As there is not one particular project in question, there does not exist a whole financial budget, but it was clear that the actions taken, have been costly, the total expenditure totalling tens of millions, in Icelandic crowns. These expenditures have mainly been used to improve the working conditions and equipment.

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### WHP becomes more visible

The employees are gradually becoming more aware of health promotion/health care issues in the workplace. According to the quality and service manager there is a noticeable change in the employees' perspectives. The new position of quality and service manager for example, as well as the intervention of an occupational therapist (private firm) have made these efforts a lot more visible and thus have supported the integration process. As an example of how the integration of health promotion into the establishment has been achieved, the DOC focuses internally on the issues brought up during the "Annual Occupational Healthcare Week", organised each year by the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health. The health care issues are reflected in the daily routine of the employees at work e.g. by offering healthy food in the cafeteria and providing experts from outside the institution to give lectures concerning health promotion and health care in the work environment.

As there is not a matter of one large project under consideration, the main projects that the DOS has been working on, within the field of health promotion for the staff and occupational health care, will be mentioned.

### Putting WHP into practice

- Three years ago the office hired a private firm to make an evaluation of the work environment of the employees. An occupational therapist and

an architect made an evaluation of the entire establishments' work environment in co-operation with the managers and the employees. As a result of the evaluation the entire working conditions have been renewed with the employees' health in mind.

- Employees at the Directorate of customs can get a refund for part of the cost (2000 kr. per month) they pay for a physical exercise programme, physical therapy or any similar service function.
- The DOC, like all other public work sites in Iceland is smoke-free and the office offers to pay for employees who wish to take courses that may help them to break the habit of smoking.
- All the employees at DOC have the opportunity to attend one course per year outside of office hours, which the office will pay for (within a reasonable limit).
- The DOC took part in the project "Striking the Balance" which was a co-operative project between the city of Reykjavik, Gallup in Iceland and foreign participants, but the project was funded by the European Union. The purpose behind the project on the part of DOC was to hasten the implementation of flexible work hours, increase work satisfaction and decrease the staff turn-over. The alternative of a flexible working hours system was considered in the project. It became clear that many of

the aspects under discussion had already been implemented in DOC and others could easily be adopted. The aspects that had already been implemented were for example: special opportunities for a flexible working hours system, leave of absence due to illness of child/children, leave of absence due to illness of another (e.g. elderly parents) and leave due to childbirth, for both the mother and father. The DOC has also been experimenting with aspects such as flexibility in work, part-time jobs, self-imposed decrease of working hours and home-based or out-of-the-office work, to state a few examples.

### A supportive communication structure

Introductions and meetings concerning the ongoing projects and changes that are being implemented are attended to promptly and the information is first and foremost distributed to the employees by electronic means (e-mail), the office newsletter is also utilised as are posters with advertisements.

As the activities of DOC are scattered all over the Reykjavik area, the managers have chosen these methods rather than to rely on large staff meetings. In projects where the work has been done in particular departments within DOC (e.g. Striking the balance), the employees have been invited to special introductory meetings where the plans and procedures regarding the projects have been discussed. Special surveys have not been conducted in order to establish

the total results from the projects within the establishment. Staff surveys concerning health promotion projects have not been conducted either, but interviews with the staff have taken place where the employees have been able to discuss matters concerning both their physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace.

### **Emphasis on working conditions**

As mentioned above, an occupational therapist is working in close co-operation with the managers and other staff members of the office. In 1998 the following factors were examined in the main offices, and in 2001 at the other sites belonging to the DOC.

- Environment: Lighting, air-conditioning, noise, floor, doors and thresholds, floor materials, elevators, accessibility for the handicapped.
- Equipment and furniture: Computers, screens and keyboards, reflection off the computer screen, desks, footrests and chairs.
- Conditions provided for the switchboard.
- Conditions provided for the front line staff.
- Conditions provided for meetings.
- Conditions provided for refreshments.
- Work environment.

The resulting reports have since been used as a foundation for improvements of the allround conditions at the DOC.

### **Giving employees a voice**

Registration of leave of absence and sickness days is done at the office, but the information has not been used statistically, e.g. in comparisons between the sexes, type of work or between different years. But this type of information is available and is reviewed for each individual employee. In relation to interviews with the employees, which have been conducted twice in the past three years, the current situation has been discussed focusing on individual cases according to need.

### **Change towards healthy attitudes**

There has not been a summary evaluation of the results of the projects that the DOC has worked with. According to the Director of DOC and the quality and service manager it was revealed that a definite change in attitudes among the staff had occurred. The most important factor in this regard is the accessibility to the specific projects and their evaluations. Following the work that has already been done, plans have been made to have significant evaluations done relating to the health promotion among the employees.

In recent years the DOC has concentrated its efforts in order to improve its service to its customers significantly. An agreement has been made with the Ministry of Finance with the focus on management by objectives and the main emphasis on quality and employee matters.

### **Improvement in customer satisfaction**

Although there are no existing evaluations concerning the level of customer satisfaction with the service they have received from DOC, there is a general consensus that customers views are generally much more positive now than they were a few years ago.

### **A promising future**

The service enterprise will continue along the same line and there are plans to strengthen the health promotion effort still more. Co-ordinating the health promotion into the regular activities in the offices is being emphasised. Supporting this goal is the fact that the Directorate of Customs is the first public office in the country to adopt a co-ordinated management by objectives policy, which means that all the processes within the establishment will be reviewed together. The employee matters are therefore of great importance and thus the policy of DOC in health promotion. The co-ordinated management by objectives policy also demands ways in which to evaluate the different aspects of the work. Therefore a foundation and a need has been created to establish goal-oriented evaluations, statistic conclusions and continuous efforts along these lines.